NEW
NICK CARTER
WEEKLY

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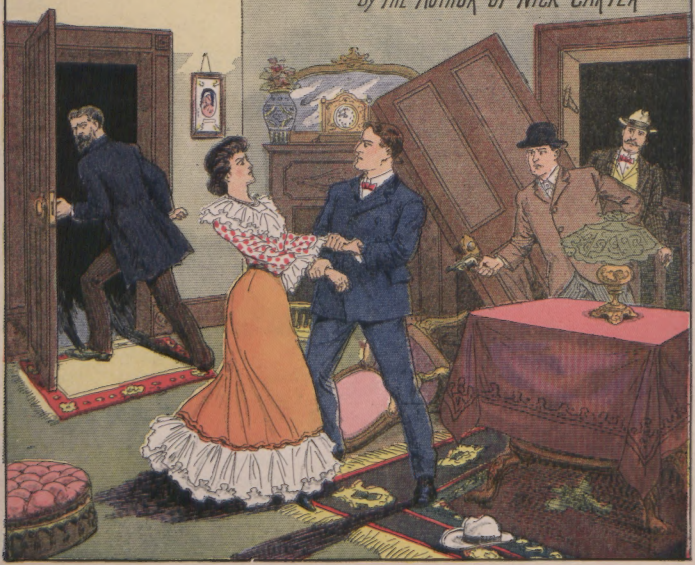
ZANONI, THE WOMAN WIZARD
OR THE WARD OF DOCTOR QUARTZ
BY THE AUTHOR OF "NICK CARTER"



As the door crashed inward, and Chick entered, followed by Peyton, Dr. Quartz sprang backward, and in an instant had disappeared from whence he came.

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ZANONI, THE WOMAN WIZARD

OR,

The Ward of Dr. Quartz.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

THE DAY OF EXECUTION.

It is a grewsome scene which opens this story, for it is laid in a prison yard in the State of Missouri, where they still cling to the old-fashioned habit of hanging condemned murderers.

The gallows had been erected in the middle of the yard; the usual number of guests, to act as witnesses to the execution, had been invited by the sheriff to be present, and there were doctors, lawyers, politicians and the usual number of privileged persons of the community among the officials who had presented themselves; and the hanging had been accomplished.

Nevertheless, the trap was not sprung without a great deal of unlooked-for delay.

First one thing and then another had gone wrong, and the execution, appointed for two o'clock in the afternoon, did not actually come off until after four; and as the month was December—the afternoon of the twenty-fourth, in fact—the gloom of evening had already settled over the earth, and actual darkness had fallen by the time the victim of the noose was swung off into eternity.

It is true that there were electric lights around the yard, and they afforded an illumination which exaggerators are inclined to describe by the phrase, "as light as day:" nevertheless, everybody knows that there is no artificial parallel with sunlight.

But the weirdness of the scene was intensified a hundredfold by the glaring arc lights, and the black

shadows cast by them, and even the most phlegmatic among that throng of spectators shuddered at the horrid thing which swung to and fro before them when the official deed was consummated.

But it was done.

When certain weak-hearted ones had clamored for delay for the reason that the judge, in sentencing the criminal, had forgotten for the moment that he was appointing an execution to take place on Christmas Eve, the law had held rigidly to its purpose; and now the vengeance of the law had been done; and now the black-capped, rope-bound victim, after hanging in the dreadful noose for the allotted time, was pronounced dead by the nerve-wracked doctors who were there officially to witness the execution.

They had felt for his pulse; they had listened at his breast for heartbeats; they had resorted—hurriedly, to be sure—to each of the devices which are adopted by physicians on such occasions, and now by their order the body was taken down and laid upon the stretcher which had been provided for its accommodation.

The day had been a terrible one in every way.

A tempest of sleety rain had hurled itself upon the city in the early hours of the morning, and it had continued without cessation through the entire day, now and then lulling into a semblance of mediocrity, and again bursting with renewed violence over the housetops and through the streets and avenues.

Far and near, everywhere, the pavements, the houses, the telegraph wires, trees, all things were enveloped in a coating of ice.

As the afternoon waned, the storm had increased in violence; the sleet had changed to fine snow; a blizzard had been born out of the coming darkness, and as the sun gradually lost its influence over that portion of the earth, the storm, like a nocturnal beast of prey, had seemed to leap with incalculable fury from the gathering night.

At the very moment when the trap fell the anger of the elements almost swept the visiting spectators from their feet; it had seemed for a moment as if it would tear the scaffold from its bearings and hurl it upon the heads of the crowd; the doctors upon the scaffold beside the condemned man had been forced to cling to the timbers around them, to resist being swept from the precarious and uncanny platform; and the body of the doomed man had been flung against them, caroming from one to another like an unwieldy billiard ball and filling with horror, never to be forgotten, each man with whom it came in contact.

But now it was over.

The horrible gibbet loomed in the glare of the electric lights, tenantless.

The body of its victim was stretched upon a prison cot, covered by a thick canvas, which, however, had to be tacked and tied into place lest the fury of the gale should seize it and carry it away over the prison walls.

The spectators drew their ulsters around them and faded away through the darkness toward their several homes, wordless—shuddering with something worse than the bitter cold of the tempest; and presently there was left beside the body only the warden and his followers, and the group of doctors whose duty it was to perform the autopsy upon the corpse.

And it was Christmas Eve.

The men there looked into each other's face and shuddered again, for there was not one among them there who did not wish himself at his own fireside.

Without speaking, without voicing the sentiments in their hearts, those men came to a unanimous decision, so that when the warden's voice interrupted their meditations, they nodded assent to his suggestion with the joint regularity of automatons.

"Gentlemen," he said, "you will hardly care to proceed with your official autopsy to-night—on such a night as this, and particularly as it is Christmas Eve, when we are all drawn toward our own firesides, and I am sure that there is no legal obligation on your parts to perform this disagreeable duty at once; what do you say to postponing it, say until after your Christmas dinners to-morrow?"

"But, the body——" began one of them, and paused.

The warden pointed across the yard toward a low wooden building which stood against the wall of the prison yard.

"We can place it there," he said. "I will take the responsibility, if you like. It is the tool house. It is perfectly secure and tight. I had it erected there since I have been warden. What do you say?"

They agreed. Who would not have done so under the circumstances?

Between them they lifted the cot with its grewsome burden, and bore it, preceded by the warden, into the little eight by ten building which, with its peaked roof, was barely high enough to permit them to stand upright.

The warden turned the switch of an incandescent light inside the small building, and together they moved the tools to one side and so cleared a convenient place for the cot to stand; and then the warden passed around it tightening the cords and tacks which held the canvas covering of the corpse in place.

Then, silently, the warden coming last, they passed out into the yard again.

The door of the tool house was locked. The warden and the doctors shook hands all around, agreed upon the hour of meeting for the morrow, and went their several ways as the spectators had done before them.

The prison yard was deserted, save by that silent occupant of the tool house, tacked and tied under the canvas covering upon the prison cot.

And that silent, motionless thing, so still and rigid, had been known to them—was, in fact—Dr. Quartz.

* * * * * * *

At midnight, when the bells in the steeples were tolling the advent of Christmas morning, the temperature of the city changed.

A breath of heat entered like a wedge through the heart of the blizzard as if the tail of a comet had switched itself through the bitter cold, cleaving it like a knife, dividing it in twain as a red-hot iron rod might cut a pathway through a snowdrift.

And the sweep and thrust of that tongue of heat, dividing, as it passed, the intense cold of the blizzard, formed a chasm like a canyon through a mountain into which the walls of rock—but in this case, cold—must fall as soon as the resistance which holds them in place shall be withdrawn.

And there, in that chasm of heat between walls of cold, was born a winter cyclone.*

That tongue of heat, sweeping through the city, skimmed the housetops and performed little if any damage upon them; but it descended between the granite towers of the prison and touched with its tip, the prison wall where the tool house stood.

The stones were lifted from it and hurled into the air as a giant would fling a pebble; a breach, so wide that a team of oxen might drive through it, was opened as if by magic through that pile of masonry; the tool house was lifted in the talons of the tempest as an eagle would lift a lamb, and it was carried away through the black darkness, just as surely.

And when, Christmas morning, the sun came out of the east as smiling as if there had never been a storm to cloud his countenance, a wondering throng gathered around that prison wall and looked in amazement upon the breach in it made by the storm, and upon the demolished house which stood facing it on the opposite side of the street.

The warden looked in vain for his tool house; the doctors sought in vain the object of their appointed autopsy.

Later—a week, perhaps, maybe two—a Kansas farmer brought into the city information that there was the wreck of what had once been a small building, and might have been the prison tool house—as was ultimately proved to be the case—on the bank of the Kaw River where it divided his farm land. But it was only a wreck; just a mass of splintered boards and timbers; just a relic of what it had once been, but with sufficient of its originality left to identify it.

And here and there, between where it fell, and the city which was seven miles away, a tool was found. Where it fell, there were several. But never anywhere was there discovered a trace of the cot, or of its canvas covering, or of its silent occupant.

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*The phenomenon described actually occurred in Kansas City in the winter of 1888. The area of the cyclone, or hurricane, was small. One building was torn to splinters, while those on either side of it were comparatively unharmed.—C. C.

Dr. Quartz had been pronounced dead by the doctors who witnessed the hanging; but the autopsy was never performed upon his body.

And the men who witnessed that hanging, remembered it with awe. They shivered when they thought of it—of the day and evening of awful cold, and of the night of tempest which followed. They shuddered when they thought of the awful burial of the doctor, hurled away into nothingness on the wings and in the talons of a hurricane.

CHAPTER II.

A MAN WITH A PRICE ON HIS HEAD.

In order perfectly to understand the sequence of incidents which followed this event, as Nick Carter afterward revealed them, it becomes necessary here to describe another scene of that terrible storm—a scene which was not explained until long afterward, when the great detective had gone thoroughly into the matters connected with it, and unraveled the most tortuous tangle of his experience.

When that tongue of heat, that tail of a comet, or whatever it was, tore its resistless way through the prison wall, seized upon the tool house and bore it aloft through the air. Dr. Quartz was doubtless as dead as a man can be who has been hung by a rope, but who has been merely choked and whose vertebra has not been broken.

The doctors who pronounced him dead, erred only by reason of their benumbed fingers, so chilled by the cold that their sense of touch was momentarily lost. They found him pulseless and apparently dead. They heard no heartbeats, and, therefore, decided that the heart had ceased to throb. They found his body limp and lifeless, and, therefore, said that life was extinct.

And doubtless it was.

Physicians will tell you that men already dead, actually dead from drowning, have been brought back to life again by proper treatment. They will tell you that given a healthy body, capable of performing all its functions to the fullest measure, life may be restored to it by artificial means after it is scientifically dead. The heart must be shaken into activity. The circulation must be induced; and if the heart is shaken into a throb or two, and the little rivers, and streams, and brooks of blood which irrigate the body are set in motion even for an instant, life begins again.

Therefore, the only error they made in their pronunciamento, existed in the fact that they did not assure themselves that the neck was broken.

They thought it was, but their half-frozen hands deceived them, that is all.

The great muscles of the doctor's neck, standing like whipcords against the noose of the hangman's rope, and strained even to greater resistance than their owner was aware of, withstood the jerk of the fall when the trap was sprung, and his neck was not broken.

And then the storm swept down, tore a breach in the wall of the prison, picked up the tool house and carried it away, tore it asunder, doubtless in the air while in transit over the city, lifted the canvas-covered cot out of its interior and bore it like a feather in the violence of its fury, on and on and on through the night, untieing a string here, pulling a tack there, and otherwise disintegrating it, until at last it turned it over and dumped its occupant into the icy waters of the Missouri.

Nor was that all.

As the waters of the Missouri received the body, so it gave it up again, halfway to Jefferson City, where it fell, miles and miles from its starting point.

It was out of and beyond the track of the blizzard, and beside it, when it fell into the water, not ten feet away, a solitary individual was paddling a leaky, flat-bottomed boat across the turbulent waters.

He heard the splash when the body fell into the water, but he could not see it, and therefore had no idea what it was; but in a moment more when his boat drifted against it, he put out his hand and seized what he instantly recognized as the clothing of a man.

Instinct sometimes acts more quickly than thought, and before this man on the river realized what he was doing, he had drawn the thing he had grasped, inboard, and flung it into the bottom of his craft; and almost at

the same moment, his boat grounded on the shore of the river.

This man knew his ground; he knew for what point on the river he was making, and he leaped out into the shallow but icy water, drew the boat's nose partway upon the low bank, and then, opening the slide of an ordinary dark lantern, proceeded to investigate his find.

And his find was a living man!

A pair of steel-blue eyes, as cold as the ice on the shore, were looking into his; but the wrists of the man were bound together behind his back, and his ankles were tied together.

The fury of the storm had shaken motion into the heart of Dr. Quartz; the icy water of the river had started the rivers of his blood to flowing. He lived and breathed; moreover, he was conscious.

"Who in——" began the man who had made this strange find; but the voice of Dr. Quartz interrupted him, as calm and as velvety as ever, though so weak that the man could scarcely hear his words.

"Unbind me. Save me. Warm me. Hide me. I will make you a rich man for life," he said; and then his eyes dropped shut and he lapsed into unconsciousness.

The man gazed in consternation at the silent form. Then he closed the slide of his lantern and returned it to his pocket.

And then he lifted the form of the doctor in his arms, and, staggering under the burden, he toiled up the bank of the river through the darkness.

But, although he staggered, the direction of his footsteps was assured. He knew his ground, for he had trodden it thousands of times before; and, presently, utterly worn by the weight he bore, he stumbled into a cabin under the wooded bank and threw his burden upon a rough couch while he proceeded to make a fire.

When that was done, and he had lighted a lantern which hung from one of the rafters of the cabin, he poured whisky between the doctor's lips, and rubbed him with his coarse hands.

And so he worked on ceaselessly until morning—until long after daylight had outshone the glimmer which penetrated the smoked globe of the lantern.

Often while he worked, the doctor opened his eyes an instant, sighed, and closed them again. Once he tried to smile, and at last he murmured a word of encouragement now and then.

And when the sun of that Christmas morning shot its gleams into the ravine where the cabin was hidden—for its owner was a man whose life was a hidden thing as well as his cabin—the doctor opened his eyes and kept them open.

"Here! Drink this; all of it if you can. I'm done!" said his rescuer. And he placed a half-filled flask of whisky in the doctor's hand and threw himself upon the floor in front of the fire, instantly falling asleep from sheer exhaustion.

For hours the doctor laid there on the couch, blinking. He was doctoring himself with one of his pet theories and remedies—the power of the will.

After a while he moved his fingers, working them energetically and systematically. Then his arms. Then his legs. He filled his lungs with draughts of air, and expelled it again with all his power, gaining strength with each effort; and so the day wore away into the afternoon, and his rescuer still slept upon the floor in front of the dying fire.

Finally the doctor arose. He tottered on his feet, but he staggered across the room and dropped into a chair that was close to the dying embers. Presently he lifted a small stick from the floor and waited; then he placed it on the fire. After a while he repeated the operation, and he did it over and over again at intervals, each less in time than its predecessor, until the fire roared and crackled in the fireplace, and the heat from it penetrated the utmost corners of the room.

The warmth from it vivified him. It started his rescuer into life also; and—well, ere another hour had passed they were seated side by side with a table between them, the doctor had finished another flask of liquor and had eaten some broth.

Through his nerves and his veins he could feel the throb of his own strong life pulsing again, and he knew that by another morning he would be as well

as ever, save that he could not turn his head or use the muscles of his neck.

There was a great welt there, around his neck, as if a hot iron had been passed around it, searing the skin, and swelling the glands out of all proportion to their normal size.

And the conversation, carried on in jerks between the two men, was characteristic.

"I'm Josh Hurly, an outlaw with a reward out for me dead or alive," said the rescuer bluntly, placing a Colt forty-five on the table between them and keeping his hand on the weapon, while the muzzle of it was directed at the doctor's belly. "Who are you?"

"I am Dr. Quartz, who was hung yesterday, in Kansas City," was the equally blunt, but perfectly suave, reply.

"Great suffering Isaac! Are you? Well, I reckoned there was something like that in the wind when I saw them welts on your neck, and the sewing silk on your wrists and ankles. How did you get in the river—and here? Hey?"

"I haven't the slightest idea. The last I remember I was standing on the platform of the scaffold in the prison yard, distending the muscles of my neck in order to resist the rope. The drop fell and I became unconscious. My next recollection is of looking into your face by the light of a lantern. But I have not the slightest idea where I am, or how I got here."

"Well, you're a matter of forty-odd miles from Kansas City, as the river runs, old man. So you're Quartz, eh?"

"Yes; I'm Quartz," smiled the doctor, blandly.

"You're a tough lobster, ain't you?"

"I expect I am; otherwise I would not be here."

"Somebody must have carried you out of that prison yard in a balloon, partner, 'cause you dropped plumb out of the clouds into the river, close to my boat, and you came mighty near to dropping into it at that."

"I had no balloons handy when I was hanged," said the doctor, "so I am as much mystified as you are about the event."

"Well, we can't explain it now, nohow, so we might as well let it rest. Do you remember what you said to me when you opened your eyes for a minute in the boat?"

"Perfectly."

"About the dough?"

"Perfectly."

"Well, if it hadn't been for that, I'd have gone through your pockets and then chucked you back into the river, for I trust no man; not one. But I reckon you want to keep about as much in the dark as I do, now; eh?"

"Quite as much."

"You said you'd make me a rich man for life; can you do it?"

"If anything between fifty and a hundred thousand dollars is rich to you, I can."

"Whew! Do you mean that?"

"Yes, I mean it."

"And you can get your hands on it?"

"I certainly can. I can get it, and I can and will give it to you."

Hurly withdrew his gun from the table, dropped it in his boot-leg, and then thrusting his hand forward, said:

"Shake, partner."

CHAPTER III.

THE SHADOW OF DR. QUARTZ.

Nick Carter was seated in his study conning the morning papers when a card was given to him whereupon was engraved the name of Albert Peyton.

"Show the gentleman up at once," said the detective. "I will receive him here."

For the name of Albert Peyton was well known to him. He was the man who for seven years prior to the last September had been relentlessly pursued by Dr. Quartz; but Dr. Quartz was supposed to have met his Waterloo at that time. Arrested in September, tried almost at once, convicted without delay and hanged on the day before Christmas.

Albert Peyton had been Dr. Quartz's friend in Europe, seven years ago, and he had been Dr. Quartz's victim ever since, until the arrest, trial and conviction

of that man had freed him and his beautiful young wife, Minerva, from their Nemesis.

A moment later, Albert Peyton, large, handsome, strong of mind and in body, the picture of healthy energy, self-reliant, confident and bold, entered the room.

"Carter, how are you?" he exclaimed, extending his hand. "It seems an age since I saw you, and it is in reality, seven months or more, for now it is the middle of May, and we have not met since the trial of Quartz."

"Take a seat, old chap," said Nick. "The fact that I receive you in this room is sufficient proof of my own pleasure at the meeting. I am glad you had the kindness to look me up, and I always felt an especial friendship for you and your beautiful wife. How is she, by the way?"

A shade crossed the brow of Peyton as he dropped into the proffered chair and listened to Nick's question.

"She's not well, Carter," he replied, laconically.

"No? I'm sorry to hear that," said Nick; and waited.

"Oh, she's well enough as far as bodily health goes, but——"

He paused, and as Nick remained silent, he presently continued:

"The fact is, old man, she's got—er—ideas."

Nick laughed.

"Isn't that something new in the line of ailments?" he asked.

"I don't know, I'm sure. Neither will you when you have heard my story."

"Ah; it's a story, is it?"

"Yes; and we've come all the way across the continent to tell it to you."

"Indeed! What is it?"

"I've tried my best to talk her out of it. I've resorted to every device I can think of, old man, to disabuse her of the fancy, but the plain, unvarnished fact is that she has got our old enemy, Dr. Quartz, on the brain."

"Well, one could hardly blame her for that, after all you went through with, together."*

*See No. 415.

"No. I suppose not."

"Tell me about it. I'm not a physician, but perhaps I can suggest something that will help you in your dilemma."

"You'll have to suggest it to her, then. She wants to talk with you."

"Why didn't you bring her here with you?"

"She's tired out with the trip, for one thing. Then, I was not sure that I would find you at home, and—well, I wanted to talk with you alone, first."

"I see. Now tell me what the trouble is about."

"It's about Quartz; no more, no less."

"She imagines things about him, I suppose."

"I think she does; she insists that it is not imagination."

"How long has she been this way?"

"Since about the first of February, I should say; perhaps not quite so long. You know, after the execution of Quartz, she was quite happy for a while. She said she felt as if she had been freed from a terrible burden. The only cloud that seemed to remain over her after that was her sister, Zanoni. You know we never did know what became of Zanoni. She disappeared as utterly as if the earth had swallowed her."

"Yes; I know," replied Nick, rather moodily for him, and with clouded brow. "Zanoni has puzzled me as well as your wife. I have always thought that she would appear again in some wickedness akin to what Quartz would do, if he were alive; but her continued silence has made me think——"

"What?"

"That perhaps Quartz murdered her that night after she liberated him from prison; the night of the discovery of The Great hotel murders."*

"Do you really think that?"

"No; I can't say that I really think it; but I have often thought it might explain her silence. You see, Peyton, say what you will, Zanoni is, or was, as mad as any woman confined in an asylum for the insane; but with this difference: She had a method in her madness. Dr. Quartz had utterly destroyed her sense

*See No. 415 of the NICK CARTER WEEKLY, "The Great Hotel Murder."

of right and wrong, just as he once sought to destroy yours. She had become a degenerate in the sense that she had no compassion, she loved crime for crime's sake, and she delighted in cruelty and in inflicting pain. But she was also so thoroughly learned in the sciences practiced by Dr. Quartz that she had become a menace to him rather than a help. I have thought that he might have put her out of the way that night."

"Between you and me, Nick, I think Zanoni could give Quartz cards and spades and beat him at that, in some ways," said Peyton.

"That is partly true, I have no doubt. Quartz admitted on the witness stand, when he had given up all hope of escape, that she was, if she chose to be so, more dangerous than he, for the reason that she was more subtle. Don't you remember his saying, 'There are some branches of the sciences I practice, in which the pupil has become the teacher; in which Zanoni could teach me?' Don't you remember his saying that?"

"Perfectly."

"That is why I think he murdered her. The pupil had outstripped the teacher in some of their studies; poisons, for example."

"Yes; and jugglery."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Merely that I don't believe she passed two years in India for nothing. She used to call herself a wizard, when she was a little girl. I know that her thoughts tended that way, but—however, I did not come here to speculate upon Zanoni's accomplishments, but to discuss a real trouble."

"All right, Peyton. Go ahead. What is it?"

"My wife insists that Dr. Quartz is alive."

"Nonsense!"

"That is what I tell her; but it does not change her opinion in the least."

"Well?"

"She insists that she has seen him."

"Seen him?"

"Yes; met him face to face."

"That is impossible, of course."

"Of course. And yet——"

"And yet, what?"

"Look here, do you think there is any possibility whatever that he could have escaped that hanging?"

"No; I do not."

"The doctors pronounced him dead."

"Certainly."

"And they put his corpse in the tool house."

"They did."

"The tool house was carried away by the storm, the fragments of it were found; but, old man, nothing of the cot on which he was placed, or of his body, has ever been found."

"True enough."

"Well, might he not have got out of it somehow?"

"Why, no; I don't see how. Do you?"

"No, I don't."

"You must remember that part of the cot was of iron and would sink; that the fragments of the tool house were found near the river."

"What of that?"

"Simply, that in all probability the cot with its burden was thrown into the river by the storm and sank."

"That is really what I have always supposed."

"The bottom of the Kaw River is soft mud. The cot with its burden would sink into the mud and the river would never give it u

"But suppose he wasn't thrown into the river. Suppose that rope did not break his neck and the storm and other things revived him, what then?"

"What is the use of supposing such a thing as that?"

"Isn't it within the range of possibility?"

"No; I don't think it is."

"Well, old man, that is the sort of argument I have used with my wife—just the sort you are using with me; but you can't convince her, all the same. She says that Quartz is alive, and she wants to tell you about it."

"All right," said Nick. "When?"

"Now; if you will come with me."

"You said a moment ago that you had some reason for wishing to see me first, but you have not told me what it is."

"I merely wanted to suggest to you that perhaps Zanoni was doing it all. That she has found a way to represent Quartz somehow, and so to terrorize her

sister; but you met that idea before I announced it by suggesting that Zanoni is dead."

"My suggesting it does not establish it as a fact."

"No."

"Does your wife think she has also seen Zanoni?"

"No. She has not seen her; but she insists that she has felt her presence, if you know what that means. I'm blowed if I do."

"Perhaps she will explain it. Let us go to her," replied Nick.

CHAPTER IV.

THE CRIME AT THE HOTEL MAMMOTH.

"Have you ever had any visitations of the sort?" asked Nick, as they left the house together and started along the street toward the hotel where Peyton was stopping.

"Not one."

"It was against you, rather than against your wife that he manifested his enmity always, wasn't it?"

"Sure. He let her severely alone, beyond frightening her nearly to death a thousand times or more."

"If he were really alive and well to-day, don't you think he would manifest himself to you rather than to her?"

"I'm not so sure about that. I think that Quartz was always a little afraid of me. I almost licked him, that time in the hotel in Paris."

"Peyton, Quartz never saw the human being he feared—even Zanoni. And as for your handling him; well, you are a great, hulking fellow, but I don't think you could stand up against Dr. Quartz, if he were here now."

Peyton shrugged his shoulders.

"I wouldn't hesitate to have a try at him all the same, if he were on earth again," he said.

"I am quite convinced of that. How has he manifested himself to your wife, if it can be called a manifestation?"

"Now you are getting at it, Carter. She insists that if he is not alive, he is haunting her."

Nick did not laugh, as Peyton expected he would do, but walked on soberly and silently for some distance. Presently he asked:

"Is your wife perfectly reasonable on all other subjects?"

"I expected that question. I have wondered, sometimes, if some of his hellish machinations might not have affected her brain; but no. I know that is not the case, and you will know it also when you see her."

"Well, tell me how he has manifested himself, if we may suppose a case."

"We have been on the Pacific Coast ever since the trial. We were very happy there, too, until some time about the beginning of February, when she began to get nervous. I asked her many times what was troubling her, and she would give me no satisfaction; but at last she told me she thought Quartz was alive, and was still pursuing us."

"Well?"

"After that she told me each time she thought she saw him. However, she will tell you all about it, and it is better that you should get the information first hand, isn't it?"

"Certainly."

"We are almost at the hotel now."

"What time did you arrive in the city, Peyton?"

"This morning, early."

"I don't suppose that Dr. Quartz traveled on the train with you, did he?" asked Nick, in a jocular tone, and, greatly to his amazement, Peyton replied:

"That's the devil of the whole thing. If he is alive he did that very thing."

Nick came to a halt in the street.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"I mean that my wife saw him at stations on the route, or insists that she did, which is the same thing."

"This is a serious matter," murmured Nick.

"You bet it is serious."

"What more?"

"We stopped off two days in Denver. My wife claims that she saw Quartz twice—once each day—while we were there."

"Humph!" said the detective.

"We stopped again in Chicago, and were there three

days, for I was trying to talk her out of the idea all the while."

"Naturally."

"She saw him every day while we were there, and once twice in one day."

"Humph!" said Nick again.

"You bet it's 'humph'! It's 'humph' with a vengeance, old man."

"So it would seem."

"The whole thing boiled down to a simmer, is that either Quartz is alive, or my wife is going mad. And I can't believe that, old man. I can't believe that."

"We won't believe it, Peyton. We will believe anything rather than that."

"Even that Quartz is alive?"

"Yes. Even that Quartz is alive."

It was Peyton's turn to stop in the street.

He turned and faced the detective and put out his hand.

"Shake, Nick," he said. "That is very good of you."

"I mean it," said Nick. "I'm not joking."

"Neither am I."

"You misunderstand me. What I mean is that if your wife insists in my conversation with her, and after I have done questioning her, that Quartz is alive, I will believe her."

"Actually believe her?"

"That is what I mean."

"I thought you meant that you would pretend to believe her."

"No. I mean what I say. If your wife is right, she can convince me of it. If she is wrong I can convince her that she is wrong. That is what I mean."

"Good blood in you, old man."

"And, after all, stranger things have happened than that Quartz should not have been killed by that rope; that he should not have frozen to death that night, if the rope failed to do its work; that he should not have been drowned in the river, or dashed to pieces by the stones if there was life left in his body. I am prepared to believe almost anything about Quartz."

"Now this proposition is a little bit tough; you will admit that."

"Yes."

"*If it were Zanoni, now——*"

"*Well, perhaps it is Zanoni, impersonating Quartz.*"

"But Zanoni could no more have refrained from letting her sister know that she was around and doing business, than a fly could keep out of molasses."

"You don't know Zanoni," said Nick, laconically.

"Oh! Don't I, though!"

"No, you do not. You have not given her credit for half her possibilities."

"Perhaps not."

"She's got the deftness of Satan with the brutality of Hercules; the wisdom of Solomon, with the recklessness of the devil; the shrewdness of a woman, with the courage of a man; the softness of a siren, with the strength of a Hercules; the learning of the living wise men of the earth, with the ingenuousness of a girl graduate; and the beauty of an houri, with the brutality of hell itself."

"By Jove, Nick! You've about hit her off."

"If she is alive, look out for her. There will be something doing, some day."

"You make me shiver."

"If she has been living all this time and has still kept quiet, it has been only because she has been preparing herself in some new field or fields."

"B-r-rr! You make me dread her as much as Quartz."

"When you came to my house to-day, Peyton, my first thought, when I read your card, was that Zanoni had turned up. That is what I supposed brought you there."

"You never once thought about Quartz?"

"No; because I have long considered him dead."

"You haven't changed your mind, have you?"

"No; but I am prepared to have it changed by so good and wise a woman as your wife. I tell you, Peyton, when a woman like she is tells you a thing is true, you have got to make up your mind that there is something back of it all. When she has proved, as she has done, that she can withstand all the horrors which Dr. Quartz put in her way before you were married, and still retain her reason, I am not one to suppose that

she has lost it at the first moment she tells me something which is beyond my reason. However, I will talk with her, for here we are at the hotel."

They went in together at the main entrance of the Hotel Mammoth and were passing along the wide corridor, thronged with society people, when suddenly Peyton grasped Nick by the arm in a viselike grip, and exclaimed so that many persons near him heard the words:

"There! Look there, Carter! For God's sake, look there!"

But Nick had already started forward, for he too had seen the thing that had so startled his companion.

But there were a hundred people, half of them ladies with long trains to their skirts, between him and the object that had attracted his attention, and even Nick Carter could not make headway against such impediments as those.

When he arrived at the doorway in which he had seen the face he knew, a glance told him that it was useless to pursue the search further, and he slowly returned to Peyton's side.

"It was Zanoni!" whispered Peyton. "Did you see her?"

"Yes," said Nick, "I saw her. Come on to your room. God grant that she has not been there before us."

"My God, Carter, do you think——"

"Come on, man. Don't stop."

They made their way to the elevator as rapidly as possible through the throng which obstructed their passage; they entered one of the many elevators, and it never seemed to ascend so slowly; they left it, and ran along the upper corridor toward the room which Peyton had said was his; they knocked at the door, but there was no answer.

Nick attempted to open it, but it was locked, and he called to a passing chambermaid to open it.

She complied, and Nick leaped into the room; but only to turn again and attempt to stay the progress of his friend, for one swift glance had told him that the worst had happened.

Mrs. Peyton had been murdered before she could give her testimony to Nick Carter.

CHAPTER V.

THE MAN WHOM NICK DESCRIBED.

The murder had been a brutal one, too; not at all like the delicate jobs which Dr. Quartz and his followers were so fond of performing.

Mrs. Peyton had first been stabbed, and then struck over the head with a heavy instrument so that her skull was crushed; and as if not satisfied with this, the fiend who had attacked her, had deliberately disfigured her beautiful face by slashing an X-like cut across each cheek, and the forehead.

The weapon with which she had been stabbed was an ordinary jackknife—a cheap one, too, such as may be purchased at any hardware store for a quarter.

But it was a big knife and the blade of it was long and murderous; quite sufficient for the purpose for which it had doubtless been purchased, for the knife was new.

Nick Carter saw all this at a glance, and then he turned and seized his friend; but Peyton, beyond a gasp of horror, controlled himself admirably.

He pushed the detective aside gently, and got upon his knees beside the body of his wife, still warm with the life that had so lately been stricken out of it.

"The blow has fallen, sweetheart!" he murmured, as if she could hear him. "That awful fate against which we have fought so long a time together, has found you at last. I was prepared for it, dear, better than I supposed. The shock is not so awful as I imagined it would be, at times when we have both dwelt upon it as a possibility.

"And they were not content with killing you, were they? They had to slash that poor, dead face! As if they could hide its beauty from me!

"That will never leave me, sweetheart. It will go with me always, wherever I am."

He bent over and kissed the lips, still warm with life; and then he rose to his feet, and turned, facing

Nick, who stood with bowed head behind him, silently.

"Carter!" he said; and put out his hand.

Nick grasped it and pressed it so that it would have pained him at any other time; but he uttered no word of condolence.

What could he say at such a time? in such an hour?

The chambermaid who opened the door for them, had seen enough to give the alarm, and already there was excitement brewing in the hall. She had fled and given the alarm, and already it had been telephoned to the office; so Nick stepped quietly to the door, closed it and stood there waiting until the hotel detective and the clerk should arrive upon the scene.

And they came almost at once.

Nick admitted them, and they stood aghast at the spectacle.

"I am Nick Carter," he said, simply. "This gentleman is my friend. It is his wife who is dead on the floor."

"Great Heaven!" added the clerk of the hotel, for he remembered the beauty of this woman so cruelly struck down while waiting for her husband to return to her from his errand.

The hotel detective came forward.

"Mr. Carter," he said, "pardon me for saying it at such a time, but I am awfully glad you are here. Did you expect this crime? Is that what brought you?"

"We feared it, Mr. Peyton and I," replied Nick, "but we were too late to prevent it."

"Who has done this awful deed?" gasped the clerk.

"Who, indeed!" replied Nick, keeping silent, for reasons sufficient to himself regarding his knowledge of the affair.

Then he turned to the hotel detective again.

"If you will see that all is as quiet as possible in the hotel, and send for the coroner as rapidly as possible," he said, "we will get the body away without delay. Mrs. Peyton shall be taken directly to my own house as soon as we have permission to remove it."

"Thank you, Carter," said Peyton.

His face was like wax, and yet it was composed, and he stood among them there like one whose heart has gone out of his body to another world, leaving only the brain and the power to act in the body it has left.

The hotel detective departed to carry out Nick's suggestion, and the clerk, also at his suggestion, stepped into the hallway to stand guard over the door. Thus, for a moment, Nick and Peyton were left alone together.

The latter was standing with folded arms, looking down upon all that remained of his wife whom he had loved so well; but Nick Carter's eyes were traveling rapidly around the room, searching, while he himself did not move from his tracks, every corner of it with a glance which nothing could escape.

There was the new jackknife, still protruding from the wound; there was the heavy poker, taken from its stand beside the grate, with which she had been struck, and there was one little spot of blood against the casing of the door.

At first that seemed to be all the evidence of the presence of another person in that room; but as his glance searched from place to place, it lighted upon an envelope lying back up, upon the little writing desk in one corner of the room, and he crossed to it, saw that it also was blotted by a spot of blood, and he deftly placed it in his pocket.

He returned to Peyton then.

"I will step outside and leave you alone with her as long as may be," he said. "I will lock the door after me."

"Thank you, Carter," was the reply.

Outside he called the chambermaid who had admitted them, and questioned her, although he had no need to question anybody, for he knew only too well who had committed the crime.

Nevertheless, the maid had seen no person enter or leave that room since Mr. Peyton went out an hour earlier, and she had been in the hall all the time.

He passed down the corridor to the office of that floor, and questioned the clerk who was stationed there, and whose duty it was to know all persons who ascended to the floor; but the clerk had seen no person of whom he could cherish the least suspicion.

"Has there been no man nor woman here whom you did not know, or know about?" asked Nick.

"Not one."

"A beautiful woman, with dreamy, black eyes, with a queenly carriage, and the grace of a fawn?"

"I have seen no such person, sir, I am sure. Everybody who has passed this office, has been either a guest of the hotel, or was conducted to some guest upon whom they were calling. And there has been no such person as you describe."

"Let me try once more," said Nick. "I will describe as simply as possible."

"Yes, sir."

"I have you seen a man, a trifle taller than I am, but much broader? So broad in the shoulders in fact, that it is noticeable. A man who will weigh two hundred pounds, but who walks with the agility of a caged panther and with the suggestion of the tiger in his very air. A man with eyes, which, if you saw them, you could never forget. Great, round, blue eyes, so cold that they make you shiver, or if not that, so warm that you wonder about them even after the glance has been withdrawn from you. A man with a face that is not handsome, but is yet so fascinating that you wonder about it after it is gone, and conjecture to whom it might have belonged. A strong face. A kind face. A hard face and a soft face. A man with a personality which surrounds you and envelopes you with something that is fascinating and at the same time fearsome. And if he happened to speak to you, a man with a voice which once heard, will never be forgotten. It is as soft as the purring of a cat, but deep and resonant also. Have you seen such a man?"

The clerk was staring into the detective's face, speechless, until he had finished; and then he gasped out:

"Yes, sir. I have. I have seen just that man."

Nick gave a start in spite of himself, for he had described Dr. Quarta.

"How is it, then, that you say no one has been here whom you did not know, or know about? Is the person I have described to you stopping here?"

"No. That is, perhaps he was, and he may be here now, on another floor. He was here I think. No, sir, to tell you the truth, now that you speak of it, I don't think I ever saw the man before in my life, but he impressed me with knowing him. He bowed and smiled, and called me by name as he passed, and——"

"That will do," said Nick. "I know the rest. Did he go toward that room?"

"Yes, sir, he did."

"And did you see him when he left the floor?"

"Yes, sir."

"When was that?"

"He went down in the elevator which descended last before you came up."

"So near, so near," thought Nick. "So near to meeting him face to face. My God! That he is alive after all. Poor Minerva was right."

He pondered a moment, and then asked:

"How long was that man on the floor? Can you tell me that?"

"A full half hour or more, sir."

"Are you sure of that?"

"Certainly, sir."

"Did you see him go to that room, or to any room?"

"No. I cannot see the doors from my desk."

Nick turned away and went back to the room where poor Peyton awaited him.

When he entered, Peyton was standing as he had left him, looking down upon the face of his dead wife.

"Come, old chap," said Nick, kindly, "this won't do, you know. You had much better weep, or curse, or do something, than to stand here in that silent way."

Peyton threw up his head and shook it as if to throw off some spell which held him.

"All right, Nick," he said. "I'll try to do whatever you say. Has the coroner come?"

"No; but he will be here in a moment, now."

"And then we can take her to your house?"

"Then we will take her to my house, surely."

"And after that, Nick?"

"After that, old fellow—after we have done all that can be done for her now, my life and my brain, my strength and my effort is yours until we have rid of the earth of these scourges."

"You won't leave me, Nick?"

"Leave you? No; nor shall you leave me. We will work together to one end—and you know what that is."

And then they wrung each other's hands in silence.

CHAPTER VI.

A MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE.

During the next two days, Nick devoted himself entirely to his friend Peyton, and any person observing him, and not knowing him or being familiar with his methods, might have been excused for thinking that he was neglectful of the crime that had been committed.

But the great detective was not idle, although he appeared to be.

The case presented many strange aspects to him.

On the one hand it seemed impossible to accept the theory that Dr. Quartz was alive; and on the other there seemed to be convincing evidence that he was.

The testimony of the hotel clerk to whom he had described the man might after all amount to little or nothing, and yet the expression of his face when Nick so graphically described the impression which Dr. Quartz would make upon a stranger, rather than the man himself, went far toward convincing the detective that the clerk had seen such a man, whether that man was Dr. Quartz or not.

It seemed incredible that Zanoni, fiend though she was, could murder her own sister in the way it was accomplished; and yet it seemed equally incredible—or even more so—that Dr. Quartz could be alive and in the city, walking about without disguise, and after a manner openly defying Nick Carter and the police as well.

But in whatever manner Nick endeavored to work out an explanation of what had occurred, in his own mind, he was inevitably confronted by the facts of the case, which there was no possibility of controverting.

Mrs. Peyton had been cruelly murdered in her room.

Dr. Quartz prior to her death she had insisted that she was haunted by the constant reappearance of Dr. Quartz.

This suppositious fact had made such an impression upon her that she had persuaded her husband to travel with her across the continent in order that she might tell Nick Carter about it.

The clerk of the floor on which the Peyton room was located in the hotel, when told of the impression which Dr. Quartz made upon a stranger seemed at once to remember having seen the man.

Nick, himself, had seen Zanoni in the hotel. He was positive of that.

On the other side of the question he assembled these facts:

Dr. Quartz had been hanged by the neck until he was pronounced dead by the doctors who officially witnessed the hanging.

He had been taken down, sewed under a canvas covering on a cot, and left in a tool house in the prison yard on a night when any living person would have frozen to death in a short time if thus exposed.

A phenomenon of nature had come along and made a cyclone which had borne tool house, cot and corpse away into the unknowable, and nothing of any of these things had been heard of since that time, and something like five months had elapsed since the event.

The murder, as has been said, was not as if Zanoni had done it, to be sure; but neither did it resemble the artistic methods of Dr. Quartz.

The infamous doctor was a professed lover of beauty. It was not at all like him deliberately to slash gashes across the face of his victims; rather did he enjoy rendering them even more beautiful in death than they had been in life.

Time after time the detective went over these facts on each side of the argument, and he inevitably arrived at the same indefinite decision—where he would shake his head and return once again to the beginning.

But there was an incident to happen which should puzzle him yet more greatly.

Peyton had purchased a lot on Woodlawn where his wife was laid to rest, and in the meantime—that is, during the days which intervened between the time of the murder and that when all the duties consequent upon the death of Mrs. Peyton had been attended to—Nick

had given each of his assistants a commission to attend to.

Chick was dispatched to Kansas City with all speed to collect every possible fact in connection with the execution of Dr. Quartz and the storm which followed it.

Patsy and Ten-Ichi were each sent out on free lance expeditions, day by day, in search of some trace of the woman, Zanoni, and that, outwardly, at least, was all that Nick Carter had done since the murder.

Mention was made in the last chapter of an envelope found by him on the table in the room where the murder was committed, and of a tiny spot of blood found upon it; but the contents of that envelope had told him nothing; it, and its contents had been intended to tell him nothing.

The thing inside the envelope was merely a penknife, with the blade stained with blood.

The jackknife left in the wound could not, of course, have been used for the slashing of the dead woman's face. Nick had realized that instantly when he viewed the corpse, and the murderer had foreseen that he would do so.

Placing the penknife inside the envelope and leaving it on the desk in the room, had evidently been intended as a piece of impertinence by the murderer: as if to say that time need not be wasted in looking for the knife which did the cutting, since here it was.

And yet that knife was an additional food for thought for the detective, since it was one which he remembered to have seen in the possession of Dr. Quartz.

But Dr. Quartz might a dozen times have given it to Zanoni since the time when Nick Carter last saw it in his possession. The mere fact that it had once been the property of Dr. Quartz, proved nothing whatever to the mind of the detective, save that it had been deliberately placed in the envelope to suggest a further puzzle to him.

And then came the incident which was to afford him a still greater puzzle.

The occasion of the funeral of Mrs. Peyton was one which the detective believed might be rife with events if the person who killed her, or who was responsible for her death, intended to keep up the warfare so terribly inaugurated.

"If Dr. Quartz is alive," he argued to himself, "or if Zanoni is the woman I think she is, one or both of them will manage to be present at that funeral, or at least at the grave."

Acting upon this idea, he instructed Patsy and Ten-Ichi how to act on that occasion.

He personally assisted at the disguises of each of them, rendering them as perfect as his own art could suggest, and clothing them so that he believed there was little possibility that either would be recognized by Zanoni—or even by Dr. Quartz—if he were alive and should be present.

Patsy's duty was to attend at the house during the services, and to follow the hearse to the Grand Central Station. Ten-Ichi's duty was to take up the funeral party at the Grand Central Station and to continue with it, or near it to the end.

Nick, himself, was merely to keep beside Albert Peyton until they were back again inside the detective's house, and he did not intend to appear to be interested in anything save the occasion itself.

This program was carried out in detail as he had planned it, and the puzzle came soon after midnight that night, when the unhappy Peyton had retired to his room, and Nick had drawn his two young assistants into his study to discuss with them the events of the day.

He had cautioned them particularly not to compare notes with each other until they had talked with him, for he knew thoroughly how readily the mind will take up a suggestion offered by another, if that suggestion happens to coincide with existing ideas.

He had noticed ever since they returned to the house, that both Patsy and Ten-Ichi—that is that each of them—had or believed he had something of importance to communicate, and that each found it difficult to await the call of their master to unfold the news to him.

"Now, my lads," he said to them, "I am going to talk to you separately, but in the presence of each other,

which means that no matter what one happens to say, I do not wish the other to make any remark whatever until I call for it. Now, Patsy, tell your story."

"I can tell my story in a very few words," replied Patsy. "I saw Dr. Quartz. That is all there is to it."

"Very good," said Nick, calmly. "Now, let us be sure that you are right in making that statement. That is, that you have made no mistake and that you were not deceived."

"I saw him as plain as I see you now. I know that I make no mistake. I know the man. You know that I know the man. Heaven knows that I ought to know him well enough."

"Very well. Go on. What happened then?"

"You told me if I saw him, or Zanoni, to make no demonstration whatever, and not to call an officer, or to do anything of that kind, but to use every effort and every bit of skill that I am master of to keep either one of them in sight, and to follow until I could put you on the trail."

"That is correct, Patsy. Now, if you saw him, why did you not carry out those instructions? Surely you tried to do so."

"I just couldn't, that's why."

"Tell me about it."

"I saw him at the Grand Central Station at exactly three o'clock. He was standing in the doorway which opens into the outer room of the waiting room at the west end of the big waiting room."

Ten-Ichi started forward at this juncture, but a warning glance from Nick kept him silent.

"You are sure, Patsy, that it was exactly at three o'clock, are you?"

"Exactly three by the big clock in the station. I looked."

"What happened then?"

"The old villain looked at me and smiled, just as if he knew me. He was about thirty or forty feet away from where I was standing. I felt a cold chill run down my spine when I saw him, and then, when he raised his finger and beckoned to me——"

"What?"

"That's what he did. When he raised his finger and beckoned to me, I started toward him. I thought if he knew me, there was no use in mincing matters, and that I might as well take after him at once."

"Well?"

"When I started toward him, he turned and went through the door I have mentioned. I started on the jump then, but when I got to the door he had disappeared, totally. There were several persons in that small room, but not one of them was Dr. Quartz, or looked in the least like him, and I know that he did not have time either to escape from the room, or to change himself so that I wouldn't know him. I asked two or three if they had seen such a man, and described him to them, but not one had seen him. All the same I saw him, and he disappeared as if he had faded away into thin air."

CHAPTER VII.

ONE OF THE WIZARD'S TRICKS.

The detective turned to Ten-Ichi.

"Now let me hear what you have to say," he said.

Ten-Ichi seemed to hesitate now, to tell what he had to say, but after a moment, he remarked:

"I don't like to take issue with Patsy, but one of us has made a mistake. I hope I am excusable for not believing at the present moment that I am that one."

"All right," said Nick. "Let us hear what you have to tell me."

"I saw Dr. Quartz at the very same minute when Patsy says he saw him, that is, at precisely three o'clock by the clock in the waiting room of the station."

"That seems to be corroborative of what Patsy has told us," said Nick. "I don't see any discrepancy there."

"The discrepancy exists in the fact that I did not see him in the same place where Patsy says he saw him. In fact, he was not nearer than two hundred feet from the door where Patsy claims to have seen him."

Patsy moved uneasily in his chair, and Nick turned a warning glance toward him.

"Where was he when you saw him, Ten-Ichi?" he asked, kindly.

"Close to the swinging doors at the eastern extremity of the Forty-second Street entrance of the waiting room," replied Ten-Ichi, emphatically.

"And you are quite sure that the time was exactly eleven, are you?"

"I am positive, for I looked up at the face of the clock at that very instant."

"What did he do when you saw him?"

"He did what Patsy says he did to him. He looked at me and smiled; then he raised a finger and beckoned to me."

"And you——"

"I did what Patsy did. I thought if he knew me, I would transpose your instructions and have him arrested on the spot, and I started toward him on the run."

"And he—what did he do?"

"He backed out of the door into the vestibule. He seemed to stop behind a group of people who were just entering the waiting room—and he disappeared. But I am just as sure that I saw him, as I am that I see you at this minute!" and he glared at Patsy, while Patsy glared back at him, so that Nick could not restrain from smiling at them.

"Lads," he said, "you are about ready to fly at each other's throats in order to settle this dispute. But you must forget all about that, for it strikes me that we are face to face with one of the great mysteries of this case. You are each sure that you saw Dr. Quartz, and you are each equally sure that the other one did not. Now, the only possible explanation of the incident that I can see, is that both were mistaken and that neither of you actually saw him."

"But——" they each began in the same breath.

Nick raised his hand to silence them.

"The first duty of a detective, who would be a good one, is to remember that he is not and cannot become infallible, lads. I do not think that either of you could be readily imposed upon, but you must both remember that we are dealing with a proposition which I have so far been unable to fathom. I know that you are each familiar with Dr. Quartz's features. I am certain that you would both know him if you saw him, but I am not certain that either or both of you could not be deceived into supposing for an instant that some other person might be he. Now, shake hands and we will talk this think over pleasantly, for the point is—and it is unmistakable—that you are both right, and you are both wrong.

"Good! Now, that is all right. Let me tell you something that I saw, and something which I did not see.

"Mr. Peyton and I, as you both know, entered the waiting room at about that time. As we entered it, I saw both of you, Patsy near the west end of the room, and you, Ten-Ichi, not far from the Forty-second Street entrance. I saw you both, when you each started forward toward the supposed Dr. Quartz, for I was standing in such a position that I could keep my eyes on both of you."

Nick paused an instant while the lads cast a smiling glance at each other.

"When you started forward, I looked to see what had caused the sudden act on the part of each, and brought it about so simultaneously, and I will assure you, boys, that I saw nobody in either case who at all resembled Dr. Quartz. The fact is that Dr. Quartz was not there and that neither of you saw him."

"But——"

"Wait. I know how you feel about it. I will explain in a moment, my theory of the means by which you were each so thoroughly deceived. But first, a question. Did either of you see any person who suggested Zanoni to you "

"I did not," said Patsy.

"Nor I," said Ten-Ichi.

"Neither did I," supplemented the detective, "and yet I am satisfied that Zanoni was there, in that room, at that moment."

Patsy shook his head.

"If she had been there, and you had seen her, you would have recognized her," he said, and there was conviction sounded in his voice.

"Possibly," assented Nick. "But it is also possible that she was there and I did not see her at all; that she kept out of my sight so that I did not have a chance to recognize her."

"Yes; that is possible," they agreed.

"That she was there, I am convinced, and that she played a trick upon each of you, I am equally sure. And now I will explain. Ten-Ichi, you are familiar with the Hindu rope trick, are you not?"

"Do you mean where the fakir takes you out into the middle of a lot, pulls a rope out of a basket, throws the end of it into the air, and the end keeps sailing up until the end of it is out of sight? And that then a boy starts to climb the rope, and he climbs up until he disappears also, and you all walk away from the spot wondering what has become of the rope and the boy?"

"Yes. It is a trick which puzzled the scientific world for many years. I know that once a party of college professors traveled all the way from Oxford, in England, to study that incomprehensible trick. Do you know how it is done?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you, Patsy?"

"No, sir, I do not. I have read about it, that is all."

"It is done through the exercise of a branch of the phenomenon which was once called mesmerism, but which is now called hypnotism. The fakir who performs that trick has no rope, and no boy with him. He is careful never to perform the seeming miracle for more than two persons at a time. He merely impresses upon the minds of those two that there is a rope and a boy. That he throws the rope into the air and that the boy climbs it. It is a branch of the science that is unknown here—that of so thoroughly impressing the mind with one idea while it remains perfectly clear on all others. But it has been practiced in India for more than a century. My lads, Zanoni was there in that room. Remember, he is a wizard. Remember, he has spent months, perhaps years, of study in India. He managed, while you were in the waiting room to hear enough to each of you to compel the impression she wished to make on the minds of both, and then, at the proper moment, she made each of you at the same instant believe you saw Dr. Quartz.

"If you had each been looking at the same spot at that instant, you would have seen Dr. Quartz on that spot. If one of you had happened to have been looking at the roof of the buildings, or at the headlight of a locomotive at that instant, you would have seen Dr. Quartz at that spot.

"She had arranged your minds for the impression. At the moment when she forced it, you each believed that you saw Dr. Quartz, and you believed you saw him at whatever point your eyes happened to be fixed upon."

"Gee!" said Patsy.

"I understand it now," said Ten-Ichi.

"Chief," said Patsy, "I would like to ask a question. Could she do that trick with you?"

"Possibly," replied Nick. "I do not know. She has never tried it, as far as I am aware. I do not think she could perform it on any of us if we were prepared for it, and ready to resist it; but I have no means of knowing how great her powers are, so I will not say that she could not have played the same trick on me."

"Thank you," said Patsy. "That lets us out."

"Sure," commented Nick; and laughed.

But after the younger men had left him, he sat a long time pondering over what had occurred.

"The performance of that trick," he reasoned with himself, "would suggest that Dr. Quartz is not alive after all, and that Zanoni has made use of the same means to convince Mrs. Peyton of his proximity.

"Either of those lads would have returned to me under any circumstances, and sworn that he had seen the doctor, just as she was positive in her talks with her husband, that she had seen him.

"But there is another side to the question, also.

"Zanoni must know that I am familiar with the explanation of that trick, and the mere fact that she would try it on my assistants when there was a thousand chances to one that they would suppose they saw him in different places at the same instant, and when she knew that they would explain the circumstance to me, would suggest that she wishes to convince ME,

that he IS NOT alive, not that he IS alive. That she was attempting to work upon me by a negative rather than through an affirmative.

"I don't see but what I am up against it just as hard now as I was before. This incident explains nothing. It leaves me just as much if not any more in the dark as I was before it happened. I do not know whether Dr. Quartz is alive or not. On the one hand, she has shown me how she can convince others that he lives, and, on the other hand, she has taken the same means to prove to me that it is all a trick on her part, after she knows that I have been told that he is living, and is not dead.

"One thing only is certain—she played that trick on the clerk of the twelfth floor of the Hotel Mammoth, and whether Quartz is alive or dead, it was not he who went to the room of Mrs. Peyton. It was Zanoni himself. Zanoni, the wizard, for by every definition of the word, she is a wizard if there ever was one."

CHAPTER VIII.

UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF ZANONI.

After that there was a hiatus in everything pertaining to Dr. Quartz, or to Zanoni.

Nick Carter kept his assistants constantly on the go, in the effort to get some trace of Zanoni, he kept Albert Dorian walking the streets in the effort to find her, and in this he saw that her enmity for him would prevail upon her to show herself to him; and he resorted to every expedient he could think of himself to find her or a trace of her.

But it was all utterly without avail.

All the wonderful sagacity of the detective could accomplish nothing in the search, and after almost two weeks had elapsed, and the month was getting close to June, he told Peyton one night that the only thing left for them to do was to wait.

"If Quartz is alive," he said, "he will do something presently. I have about returned to my original conviction that he is dead."

Peyton had been told of the trick that was played on Watty and Travers, and he had more no doubt in his own mind that the same sort of deception had been practiced on his wife.

"On the point of which I was just speaking," continued the detective, "I am expecting Chick at every moment. He has completed his investigations in the West, and has telegraphed that he will be here tonight. He is about due now."

And within fifteen minutes, Chick arrived.

"It is all as plain as a pike-staff," said Chick, when the greetings were over, and he had seated himself in the study with Nick and Peyton. "Quartz is as dead as a doornail."

"All right," said Nick; "but prove it."

"I can't. Nobody can, save by——"

"Deduction," smiled Peyton.

"Deduction certainly ought to make him quite dead," remarked Nick. "But tell us about it, Chick."

"I have interviewed every one of the doctors who were present at the hanging," said the assistant. "I have seen the warden of the prison. I have been to the weather bureau and consulted with them there about the storm. I have been out to where the wreck of the tool house was found. I have talked with the farmer who discovered it. I have followed the course of the Kaw River in both directions, searching for any other evidence which might have turned up somewhere. I have been along the course of the Missouri in each direction. I have driven through the country, making a circle of the city, but generally following the path of the storm as well as I could——"

"Then you certainly went in a circle," said Nick.

"Yes, in several circles, as a matter of fact."

"And you have discovered nothing which does not carry out the supposition that the man is dead?"

"Nothing. I did find, in the vicinity of Jefferson City, that a man had picked up a piece of canvas which might have been the same piece that was sewed on the cot on which the body was placed after the hanging."

"When did he find it?"

"The day after the storm."

"And you——"

"I kept that man searching for two days, until he found that old piece of canvas for me. It had been cut in half since that time, and it had lain out of doors, too, so I suppose there was not much of its original appearance remaining."

"But you took it to Kansas City all the same."

"Sure. I took it to the warden."

"What did he have to say about it?"

"Nothing; or next to nothing. He only shook his head over it. 'It may be the same piece, for all I know,' he said, 'or it may not be the same piece. I don't think I could have identified it if I had seen it the next day after the storm.' What else was going to do with a chump like that? He wouldn't know his own grandmother if he should meet her in a crowd on Broadway."

"And that is all?"

"Yes, that is all."

"What are your own convictions, Chick?"

"About Quartz?"

"Yes."

"Just the same as they have always been since the twenty-fourth of last December."

"You think there is no doubt that he is dead?"

"I haven't any."

Nick was silent.

"Here is the case," continued Chick. "The thermometer was below zero at the time of the hanging. It was so cold that some of the spectators froze their ears and their noses. The man was hanged. When the trap was sprung he went off it as perfectly as any criminal who was ever hung in that yard. He hung there until the body ceased to quiver. The doctors—and they were some of the best in the city—stood beside him. They felt his pulse; they listened to his heart and after a while they said he was dead and ordered that he be taken down.

"After he was down, they felt of his neck, and——"

"There is a point. Did you question them about that?"

"Yes."

"Do they insist that his neck was broken?"

"They insist that there was no doubt of it, but I cannot find one of them who would be willing to take his oath that it was actually broken."

Nick shook his head again.

"Always doubts. Always conjectures," he mused aloud.

"I don't myself see any room for doubt or conjectures, either," said Chick.

"And yet, Mrs. Peyton was certain that she had seen Quartz; and Mrs. Peyton was a woman who would not be easily deceived. She had experienced too much at the hands of that man. She had undergone too many trials and too many dangers to be easily frightened."

"But might not Mrs. Peyton have been made subject to the same trick that was played on Patsy and Ten-Ichi?"

"Yes; perhaps so; but there is a point or two about her seeing him, which would make it appear that Zanoni could not have been near enough to her at the moment to have influenced her."

"If Quartz was near enough to her to be seen, Zanoni could be near enough to make use of her power, could she not?"

Nick shook his head again, and was silent.

"The whole amount of it is this," he said, presently. "There seems to be such a thing as a Quartz microbe, and I have got it," and he laughed.

"Well, Nick," said the chief assistant, "I have been as thoroughly over the ground out in that country as a man could go, and I am convinced that Quartz is dead. Maybe if you should take a trip out there your-

self, you might turn up something different; but if it is there, I can't find it."

"If anything was to be found, Chick, you would have discovered it. You have been out there searching for nothing, almost, while I have been here searching for some clew to the hiding place of Zanoni, and I am as much in the dark as if she were dead also."

"'Leave them alone, and they'll come home, and bring their tails behind them,'" quoted the assistant. "I mean by that that Zanoni will do something to let you know that's she's on top of the ground yet, if you give her a chance."

"Oh, yes. We are sure of that, of course, but——"

He was interrupted by a ring at the doorbell, and went in person to answer it, motioning for the others to wait where they were. It was then almost ten o'clock at night.

When he opened the door a young woman stepped across the threshold, and without saying a word, advanced boldly into the house until she stood in the middle of the hallway, under the light.

Then she turned her head until she faced the detective, and in a voice of one who is reciting a part which has been learned by rote, and in a dead monotone, she said:

"When the graves give up their dead, then you will find Zanoni. When sheeted ghosts walk the earth and converse with mortals, then you will find Zanoni. When the sun and the moon meet in the heavens and travel in company around the earth, then you will find Zanoni. When angels learn to swear, and devils learn to pray, then you will find Zanoni; but not till then—and till then!"

The young woman turned again, like an automaton still, toward the door, and would have passed out if Nick had not stepped in front of her; and as the words she uttered had been heard in the room upstairs, Peyton and Chick came out and descended to the lower hall also.

When Nick stepped in front of the girl—and she was scarcely more than a girl—she stopped in her tracks, and seemed to be struggling to say something more—her tongue, however, refused to utter what she wished to say.

Nick studied her appearance for a moment, and then stepped aside again, and without a word permitted her to pass out, at the same time reaching for his hat, which happened to be on the rack in the hall.

"She is under the influence of Zanoni," he said, rapidly. "Zanoni sent her here. It is barely possible that she may know something worth hearing when she comes out of this trance. I will follow her. Do you remain here, and wait up for me till I return."

Then he went out of the house, and stepping close behind the young woman, followed her so closely that he walked within ten feet of her.

He had a double purpose in doing so, one of which was to be assured that he would not lose sight of her, and the other was to protect her from possible dangers which she might encounter while in that condition, for that she was completely under the hypnotic spell was only too manifest.

It never occurred to him that there might have been a double purpose on the part of Zanoni in sending her to his house, and that one of them was to entice him out of it, just as had been done. He thought of the circumstance merely as an exhibition of Zanoni's conceit, and as an expression of her grandiloquent way of informing him that she was not far distant.

He followed her thus for more than an hour. They crossed to the East Side and turned downtown. They traversed the avenues and the cross streets, until at last the girl turned suddenly into one of those dark entrances between two houses in Rivington Street, for which that part of the city is famous.

Nick turned after her quickly, intending to seize and hold her until the spell upon her should pass away, but out of the darkness facing him there came a sudden blow and shock, and Nick Carter sank down, senseless, on the pavement.

CHAPTER IX.

THE TIGER IS SHORN OF HIS CLAWS.

When the detective started away after the entranced young woman, Chick hesitated a moment, and then, seizing his own hat, he stepped out upon the doorstep, and watched them as they made their way to the corner, and turned so that they were lost from sight; and then he was conscious, suddenly, that Peyton was beside him.

"I'm going after them," he said, starting down the steps.

"May I go with you?" asked Peyton.

"Yes; come on."

And so it was that with every turn and twist made by the girl, and by Nick, who was following so closely behind her, Chick and Peyton were not far in the rear.

And yet, they were not close, either, for Chick was well aware of his chief's impatience at not having his instructions carried out to the letter.

He had said, on leaving:

"Do you remain here and wait up for me till I return."

That was a distinct order, and while Nick might not construe it as important, if asked about it, on the other hand, he might do so, and Chick had no wish to run contrary to orders.

The consequence of this was that he did not follow his chief as closely as he otherwise would have done; and that when Nick darted into the dark entrance behind the girl, Peyton and Chick were fully half a block behind them.

Neither of them saw anything unusual; neither of them saw or heard the blow which fell on the detective's head, and knocked him senseless to the pavement; neither of them saw his body raised from the ground and borne swiftly through the dark alley to the rear of the buildings; and although they both ran swiftly forward when Nick disappeared, and must have arrived at the alley within a few seconds of the time when Nick passed into it, neither of them could discover a sign of life in evidence anywhere there, through the darkness.

They listened, but everything was as silent as the grave, save for the natural noises of the street behind them.

Not a footfall, not a breath, not the slamming of a door or the raising or closing of a window came to them out of the darkness to suggest to them where the detective might have gone.

"Strange, isn't it?" whispered Peyton. "Where could he have disappeared to?"

"He isn't far away, that is certain," replied Chick.

"What are you going to do now?"

"Wait here a respectable time for him to reappear, and take my chances on having given him offense by following."

"But if he should not reappear within what you call a respectable time; what then?"

"We'll go in search of him."

"But where will you search?"

"Search! I'll turn this block inside out from one end to the other, if necessary. It is none too savory down here, Mr. Peyton."

"So I supposed. Do you think anything could have happened to Nick?"

"No; I don't," replied Chick. "He isn't given to walking into things with his eyes shut. He'll be all

right. Don't worry. All we've got to do is to wait here until he returns."

Peyton shrugged his shoulders and was silent, and so a quarter of an hour passed.

"How long will you wait before you go in search of him?" he asked then.

"Oh, an hour or so."

"It seems about six hours since we arrived here, now."

"And in reality it is about fifteen minutes. I don't think it is more than that."

"It seems interminably long. Don't you think we ought to move forward in the search, at least to the extent of trying to find out where he is, in another quarter of an hour?"

"No, sirree!" said Chick.

"Why not?"

"Well, if he should have spotted something worth while, our clumsiness would spoil it, and Nick Carter don't like interference with his work. We have no reason to fear that he is in danger, have we?"

"N—no. I suppose not."

"If I followed Nick every time he runs into danger, with any sort of idea that I was going to act as his protector, I'd be kept pretty busy—and he wouldn't have the slightest use for me. Danger is our trade."

"I suppose so."

Another fifteen minutes passed in silence.

"Isn't it an hour yet?" asked Peyton. "It seems like a whole week."

"It's about forty minutes, I take it," replied Chick.

"When shall you decide to move forward?"

"I am not sure that I shall decide to do so at all," was the inscrutable reply.

"Great Scott, man, you don't intend to leave him in that dark place——"

He paused suddenly and laughed.

"I'm getting as nervous as a child," he said. "One would think, to hear me talk, that Nick Carter was incapable of taking care of himself."

"Just so," said Chick.

"All the same, I am filled with misgivings."

"What about?"

"Nick."

"Drop them, then. He's all right. You can bank on that."

"Zanoni can't be far off."

"Probably not. She sent that young woman to the house, and she'd have to be within a hundred miles or so of her, I reckon, to hold her influence."

Another long silence, and then:

"Chick," said Peyton.

"What?"

"Suppose that girl was sent to the house for the very purpose she worked."

"What purpose?"

"Enticing Nick out after her, and leading him into a trap of some kind."

"I have thought of that, and you can bet your life that he did, too."

"Do you think so?"

"Sure thing."

"I like to fight out in the open," said Peyton, after another pause. "I like to see my foe in front of me."

"So does anybody with any sense," replied Chick, "but you can't fight the crooks in that way. They're night animals. They want to keep in the dark."

"I wish Nick would come."

"So do I."

"Confess that you are getting nervous, too."

"I'm always nervous when Nick's out of my sight. I suppose, some day, that some of these moons who are after our scalps will get them. I say, Mr. Peyton, do you think you have got nerve enough to wait here

a few minutes while I take a look inside the blackness of that alley?"

"Why not let me go with you?"

"Do you think you can obey orders and keep quiet?"

"Try me."

"All right, I will. This once. If you fail me, I'll never take you again."

"I won't fail you."

"Very well. The orders are that you keep behind me. If you can't see me, touch me, and you will know where I am."

"Yes."

"If we see Nick, or meet him, you are not to move or make a sound unless I do, no matter what we see or hear; and if we encounter anybody else, you are to keep still and let me do the talking if there is any talking to be done. Understand?"

"Perfectly."

"Come on, then."

* * * * * * *

When Nick Carter opened his eyes he was seated in a large and comfortably upholstered chair in one corner of a room which seemed homelike, if not gorgeous.

There was a dim light burning on a table in the middle of the room, and beside it, also seated, and facing him with a smile on her beautiful lips, was Zanoni.

Nick's first impression was one of surprise that he was not bound, or fastened in any way to the chair in which he had been placed; and also that Zanoni seemed to be alone in the room with him.

That she would dare to leave him unbound, and to remain unprotected in his presence, passed his comprehension; but he was still considerably dazed from the effects of the blow he had received, and he thought to himself that there was possibly some explanation of the phenomenon which would be explained later.

And there was.

After a moment he moved his arms a trifle, and discovered, much to his surprise, that they were astonishingly weak; much too weak, in fact, to be accounted for by the blow that had felled him and rendered him unconscious.

He moved his wrists, too, to ascertain if the weapons he usually carried in his sleeves, were still there, and he discovered that they were not.

"I wonder what she has done to me," he thought. "She has done something more than merely to take my weapons away from me, that is sure. I'm as weak as a dishrag. I don't believe I could get out of this chair if I tried."

All this time Zanoni had not taken her eyes from his face, and that inscrutable smile was still in evidence.

"I hope you are comfortable, Mr. Carter," she said, presently, and speaking as if he were an honored guest whom she was delighted to receive.

"Quite so, thank you," replied Nick, determined not to be outdone in the courtesies of the moment.

"The tiger is shorn of his claws, as you have doubtless observed," she added.

"Ah!" said Nick. "Do you keep a tiger here, because if you do, and this is another question of the lady or the tiger, I think I will take the tiger, thank you."

Zanoni laughed outright.

"Be assured, Mr. Carter, that before I have done with you, you will get something that is far worse than the tiger," she said.

CHAPTER X.

A SAMSON FINDS HIS DELILAH.

"There is one question which I wish you would answer for me, Zanoni," said Nick, noticing, as he spoke, that even his voice was inexplicably weak.

"And what is that?"

"Is Dr. Quartz dead or alive? I confess I am puzzled to determine."

"Would you like to see him?"

"Yes; if I can see the real thing."

"Oh, you'll see the real thing, all right, when you get where he is," she said, significantly.

"I shouldn't like to be fooled like my two lads were, at the Grand Central Station," said the detective. "Do you think you could work that little trick on me, Zanoni?"

"No; I couldn't. I tried it and failed," she replied, with some petulance, just as a girl would murmur over a broken doll.

"What a blessing it would be," murmured Nick, as if speaking to himself, "if you were only as dead as I believe him to be."

Zanoni laughed aloud.

"Wait," she said, rising. "I will try and see if I can exert the power to show you a person who will remind you of Dr. Quartz."

She crossed the room to his side, and he reached out one hand when she was close enough for him to touch her, and seized hold of the folds of her dress; but she only drew back and shook it out of his grasp as she might have shaken a worm from her gown.

And then she laughed.

"Do you suppose, Nick Carter, that I would permit you to sit there unbound if I had not taken your strength away from you?" she asked. "Samson has found his Delilah, Mr. Carter, and I have stolen your strength away from you by the injection into your veins of a little drug I sometimes employ for such purposes."

"Thank God you are not my Delilah!" said Nick, fervently, smiling back at her. "You might fill that office very well for others, but never for me."

She frowned a little at that, for she had not expected to be taken quite so literally; and then she laughed again.

"What a wit you are, to be sure!" she murmured.

Then she stood in front of him and made passes before his eyes while Nick smiled up at her, tantalizingly.

"Yes," she murmured, presently, "I think now that you are in this weak condition, produced by my little drug, that I can show you the semblance of Dr. Quartz, just as I demonstrated him to Patsy and Ten-Ichi."

"Zanoni," said Nick, imperturbably, "if you were not so wicked, what a surprisingly handsome, beautiful woman you would be!"

She made no reply, but continued to make passes with her hands—and then of a sudden, she stepped aside.

"Look!" she exclaimed.

Nick looked, and saw, just beyond the light which burned so dimly on the table, the face, the figure, the bland smile and the cold, blue eyes of Dr. Quartz.

He uttered a cry—or tried to do so. He started forward in his chair—or tried to do so. He really did neither, for his strength had been taken from him, and he had not the strength either to rise or to cry out.

And then, like a flash, and with a peal of rippling laughter on her lips, she glided in front of him again and once more began waving her hands spasmodically in front of his eyes.

"Did you see him?" she asked. And she laughed. "Are you sure you saw him?" And she laughed again.

"Are you sure that you would recognize him if you should see him? Can I after all perform my best and favorite trick on you?" And she laughed yet again.

Then, suddenly, she turned her back upon him and walked away, back to her chair near the table, where she had been seated when he returned to consciousness.

And in the place beyond the table where Dr. Quartz had stood, or seemed to stand—in the detective's weak condition he could not determine whether the man had really appeared there or not—in that spot, at least where he had seen the vision of him, or seen him, himself, there was nothing.

If Dr Quartz had been there, he had found a way to disappear as deftly as he had appeared.

The room seemed to be tenantless save by themselves.

Remember, Nick had been weakened by the drug which Zanoni had injected into his veins, and therefore that he was in no condition to determine whether he had been played upon actually or not.

"Well, Zanoni," he said, at length, "you seem to have got me here all right; and now that you have got me, would you mind telling me what you intend to do with me?"

"Not at all. I intend to keep you."

"Alive?"

"Oh, yes; for a while, at least. I am going to practice on you."

"That is pleasant. What sort of practice is it?"

Nick stirred again as he asked the question, and he was surprised to feel a responsive tingling in his veins, as if the strength that had been stolen from him were slowly returning.

He wondered if it were. He wondered if he might keep her there, talking to him, until his muscular power should have been restored—until the effects of the drug should have worn off.

He moved his fingers; and his toes. He moved his feet ever so little against the carpet. And he looked at Zanoni just as a hunter might look at an elk or a moose he longed to kill, but which tantalizingly remains just out of rifle range.

And she seemed to read his thought, for she laughed.

"You would like to get at me, wouldn't you?"

"Indeed I would," he admitted. "Mightily."

"You are thinking about Minerva."

"Yes; and about the dozens of other victims of your murderous career."

"It is a pleasure to kill—to have the power and the will to kill," she said, in a meditative tone. "It is the same thing which the hunter feels who goes in search of the innocent deer, only that in my case I take the human family, which is, or should be, at least, much better able to protect itself."

"But your sister—your own sister!" exclaimed Nick, in wonder.

"Two of them," she corrected. "You forget Thora."

"Had you no pity in your heart for them?" asked Nick.

"Pity? What is that? Bah! you make me blush for your innocence. You should have been a pupil of Dr. Quartz. You should have learned the things he taught me. You should have learned all the secrets of the heart as he has learned them, for the basis of all this is passion. What a puny thing you are, after all, Nick Carter, with all your boasted strength, with all your acumen, with all your talents, with all your wishy-washy goodness."

She leaped to her feet and crossed the floor toward him with rapid strides, and when she was near enough she struck him a resounding slap in the face with the flat of her soft hand.

And that blow acted like an electric shock upon Nick Carter.

It seemed to be the antidote for the drug she had injected into him, or else the very insolence of the act utterly destroyed the effects of the drug. Or else, perhaps, the effect had already worn off and only needed this insult to entirely dispel it.

When the blow fell upon him, he started forward with a spasmodic energy which there was no resisting. He got upon his feet somehow. He put out his arms and seized her.

She struggled, but he held on, feeling that his strength was returning instant by instant, and that already he was as strong as she.

After a moment he knew that she could not tear herself away from his grasp, although she struggled with all her might to do so, and he laughed.

She felt in her bosom for her dagger; it was not there. She struck him again and yet again in the face with her hands, and he only laughed.

"I cannot fight back much—yet, Zanoni," he said, "but I can hold you until my strength returns in its full measure, and I mean to do so although you succeed in beating my face to a pulp in the meantime."

Then she screamed, loud and long, and shrilly, again and again.

"Scream on," he said, grimly. "Perhaps you can call aid to your assistance, but if only my muscles get to working again before they come, I shall be glad to see them."

"Curse you, Nick Carter!" she cried. "Curse you! Curse you! Curse you!"

"Curse away, Zanoni. Curses don't hurt much. Not half so much as those taps you are giving me on the face. They smart some, to be sure. I had no idea you could strike so hard. I hadn't, really. Whether Dr. Quartz is alive or dead, you are very much alive, and you certainly ought to be dead.

"Cyclones don't come where they use electricity, Zanoni, and blow bodies up into the heavens before their time. Hit on, you little fiend. You don't hurt me. You only give me great joy—great joy in that I am strong enough to hold you."

She struggled on.

She tore her dress, her clothing, she bruised her arms in his relentless grasp, for the strength was in his fingers, although it had not returned to the other muscles of his body.

She screamed again and again, and at last she called out:

"Jack, damn you, why don't you come. Jack! Jack! Jack!"

"Don't swear, Zanoni," laughed Nick. "It sounds ill from a woman's lips, especially if the woman happens to be beautiful."

"Jack! Jack! Jack!" she called again and again.

"Who is Jack?" asked Nick, still laughing, and trying in vain to dodge the blows which she rained upon his face as he held her there.

"Jack!" she called again. "By heaven, if you do not come to my assistance, I will betray you. I will! I will! Come! Come instantly! Nick Carter is holding me! I cannot break away from him! Come, or I will forget my promise! What is the difference whether you come or not, so far as you are concerned. It will do no harm for Nick Carter to know. He will soon be dead. We will kill him together, you and I, Jack. Oh, Jack!"

This time her plea was answered.

A door at the far end of the room flew open, and a man leaped through it.

For just one instant he seemed to hesitate in the

doorway; and then he started forward toward the struggling pair.

"QUARTZ!" cried Nick. "Dr. Quartz! Alive! Alive!"

But Quartz did not speak. He seemed still to hesitate, as if he were in doubt about going to the rescue of the woman in Nick Carter's grasp.

And as he hesitated some heavy body hurled itself against the other door—the one which might be called the hall door.

There was a heavy crash, and it fell inward, with splinters flying in every direction; and as it fell to the floor, through the dust which rose from the chaos, Peyton and Chick leaped into the room.

The screams of Zanoni had reached them, as well as others, and they had rushed to the rescue.

But another and an unfortunate thing happened as well.

At the first sound of a blow against the door, Dr. Quartz decided what to do.

If he had been undecided before, he was no longer so.

When the sound of it reached him, he sprang backward, instead of forward, and in an instant, even before the broken door fell into the room, he had disappeared from whence he came.

It was all done so quickly and so deftly that neither Peyton nor Chick had the slightest idea that there had been a third party there at all.

And it must be remembered that the doctor had uttered no sound. He had not spoken. He had done nothing save to enter at the door, hesitate a moment as if in doubt regarding the wisdom of rescuing Zanoni, and although Nick Carter had called out his name, he had made no sign that he heard it.

And then the blow against the other door, the crash of it as it fell, and he had disappeared.

Zanoni still fought like an enraged tigress, even after she was seized by Peyton and Chick, and Nick had released his hold upon her.

Nick Carter sank, half fainting, back upon the chair behind him; but he was still laughing as he wiped the blood from his face where Zanoni's small hands had drawn it.

"Put the irons on her, Chick," he said. "I'll be myself in a moment, now. We have got her, anyhow, and she is the one I want most, just at present. The other can wait."

"The other? What other?" demanded Peyton.

"Quartz," replied Nick, laconically. "He was here. He is alive."

"The devil!" exclaimed Peyton.

"Precisely!" agreed Nick. "But we have got the self-confessed murderer of your wife, Peyton. We must be satisfied with that, for to-night."

"Are you sure that you saw Quartz?" asked Chick.

"Chick, my lad," replied the detective, "since I came into this room I have been drugged, and the effects of it are not gone yet, and it is possible that some person has made up so like the doctor that I was deceived in this half light; but all the same, if it wasn't Quartz, who was it?"

THE END.

Next week's issue, No. 417, will contain "The Woman Wizard's Hate; or, A Dangerous Foe." This will give you the further search made by Nick Carter in the case of Dr. Quartz, and show you the intricacies of one of the weirdest cases he ever tackled.

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